

# Eliezer Wiesel

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR, NOBEL LAUREATE  
AND REMINDER OF THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

*„Those who kept silent yesterday will remain silent tomorrow.“*

## CHILDHOOD

The winner of the Nobel prize, Eliezer Wiesel was born in Sighetu Marmatiei on September 30, 1928. He spent his childhood with his parents and his sisters in Sighet until 1944 when Wiesel, his family, and the rest of the town were sent into one of the two ghettos in Sighet. Wiesel's father, Shlomo, instilled a strong sense of humanism in his son, encouraging him to learn Hebrew and to read literature, whereas his mother encouraged him to study the Torah. He only knew a few things about his father, Shlomo Wiesel, but with the Auschwitz exile their relationship radically changed. His father died when Elie was sixteen and despite his young age, his father's death didn't affect him that much.

## THE DEPORTATION TO AUSCHWITZ AND BUCHENWALD

Elie Wiesel was fifteen years old when he and his family were deported in May 1944 by the Hungarian gendarmerie, the German SS and the police from Sighet to Auschwitz. On May 6, 1944, the Hungarian authorities allowed the German army to deport the Jewish community in Sighet to Auschwitz-Birkenau. At Auschwitz, his inmate number, „A-7713“, was tattooed onto his left arm.

In his book ‚The Night‘ Wiesel remembers the first night in the camp:

*„Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed... Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.“*

(Elie Wiesel: Die Nacht. Erinnerung und Zeugnis, Freiburg, Herder 2008, S. 56)

Wiesel and his father were sent to the attached work camp Buna, a subcamp of Auschwitz III-Monowitz. He managed to remain with his father for more than eight months while they were forced to work under appalling conditions and shuffled among to three other concentration camps in the closing days of the war.

In the concentration camp, the SS soldiers watched the ‚shows‘ given by the hungry Jews who sometimes ate snow in order to stop their thirst. The soldiers were always bullying them and often beating them without any reasons. The alimentation in the concentration camp was made of sugarless coffee, a bowl of thin soup every night and a morsel of bread, and it was intentionally to little food, as the death of the prisoners was intended. The Jews in the concentration camp had to risk their lives for food which was considered a prize.

On January 28, 1945, just a few weeks after the two were marched to Buchenwald, Wiesel's father was beaten by an SS guard, while he was already was suffering from dysentery, starvation, and exhaustion. He was also beaten by other inmates for his food. Later sent to the crematorium, only weeks before the camp was liberated by the U.S. Third Army on April 11.

## HOW ELIE SURVIVED AND HIS LIFE AFTER WORLD WAR II

One of the communists imprisoned at Buchenwald, Antonin Kalina, had managed to hide almost 1000 Jewish kids in an area reserved for epidemics. When the American soldiers came in April 1945 these almost 1000 Jewish kids were still alive. Elie was among them. Elie says that he will always be mad at those who made or supported Auschwitz, but also he will be mad at God. He continues to believe that the death of six millions of people asks an unanswered question. Eliezer was wondering, ‚Why do some human beings turn into wild wolves?‘

After World War II, Wiesel was taken to France with other children, where he taught Hebrew and French. Later, he studied at the Sorbonne and worked as a choirmaster before becoming a professional journalist. In 1955, Wiesel moved to New York City, where he became a US-citizen and married his wife Marion, with whom he had a son, Elisha. At the beginning of the '70s he became a professor at numerous universities in the United States of America. In 1986 he won the Nobel prize for all of his activities concerning the fate of Jews and others who suffered due to their religious beliefs or race. With the money he earned he created a humanitarian foundation which bears his name.

## ELIEZER WIESEL - THE WRITER

Ten years after he had escaped from the concentration camp, Elie Wiesel decided to let the whole world know everything he had been through and he wrote his first book ‚Night‘. He also wrote ‚Dawn‘, a novel (1961), ‚The Town Beyond the Wall‘, a novel (1964), ‚The Gates of the Forest‘, a novel (1966), ‚The Jews of Silence‘, a personal testimony (1966).

Mr. Wiesel who is 87 years old, has returned to the remote town of Sighet on several occasions. On 2002 he came with the Romanian president, Ion Iliescu. „I thought it was going to be just one more visit, especially with the political implications, but it was impossible to contain the emotions.“ Mr. Wiesel said.

*„Who remembers the past opens the way to the future.“*

Eliezer Wiesel



Eliezer Wiesel, 15 years old



Behind Elie (left to right): his sister Bea, his mother and his sister Hilda



Map of the Jewish ghetto in Sighetu Marmatiei / House of Elie Wiesel



Jews aboard a train bound for Auschwitz.



Picture in every German history school book: The liberation of Buchenwald - in the middle: Elie Wiesel



The children who survived